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REMARKS BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ANNE C. RICHARD PRESS ROUNDTABLE JANUARY 23, 2015

This is my first time in Bangladesh and I am excited to be here. Bangladesh is a valued partner in so many ways.

Our friendship with Bangladesh goes back several decades, and it is rooted in our shared democratic values and strong economic ties. Today we are working together to solve some of Bangladesh's most pressing challenges, from disaster response to health, food security, and climate change. Bangladesh is the only country that participates in all four of President Obama's major development initiatives, including Feed the Future, Global Health, Climate Change, and Engagement with the Muslim World.

Bangladesh also contributes to peace and stability around the world, providing more international peacekeepers than any other nation. The United States is profoundly grateful for their courage and self-sacrifice every day to protect some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

It is this mission to assist the most vulnerable that is at the heart of what I do as Assistant Secretary of the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. What we do is provide lifesaving humanitarian aid to these same vulnerable people.

So our missions are intertwined – which actually explains why I've come to Bangladesh this week.

Put simply, I'm here to gain a deeper understanding of the Rohingya situation in Cox's Bazar and consult with government, humanitarian organizations, and the Rohingya themselves on the humanitarian situation. I wanted to gain insights so the U.S. government can help develop comprehensive, durable solutions on this question.

The United States recognizes the situation of the Rohingya is an important challenge that not only has humanitarian significance, but which also impacts regional stability. This is why the United States is committed to help provide nearly \$152 million since the beginning of fiscal

year 2013 in life-saving humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers, including the Rohingya, in Burma and in the region.

But our engagement is not limited to financial assistance. The United States is working closely with governments in the region to help them find just and lasting solutions to the challenge of hosting refugees and displaced persons in Bangladesh and elsewhere. And we will continue to do this.

We will also continue to encourage the Burmese government to address the underlying causes of conflict in Rakhine State and create the conditions for sustainable peace and development. The United States stands ready to assist in these efforts.

Regarding my meetings, we covered a large amount of ground, but here are the key issues:

First, I commended the Government of Bangladesh:

The United States and I personally, thank Bangladesh for what it has done to help vulnerable people. For decades, Bangladesh has hosted hundreds of thousands of Rohingya. You have cooperated with the international community, and you have launched the national Strategy for Undocumented Myanmar Nationals, which can help provide critical humanitarian assistance and protection. This strategy, which was launched a year ago, is a strong first step toward finding a just solution for these vulnerable people.

The Government of Bangladesh has also provided critical leadership in efforts to find a regional solution for the plight of the Rohingya, working closely with Burma and other governments to help alleviate the push factors which are causing the Rohingya to flee.

Included in your efforts has been a long-standing commitment to the principle of non-*refoulement*, which means not forcibly returning persons fleeing the violence and persecution to Burma. Conditions are not safe for any voluntary return at this point.

I also expressed appreciation for Bangladesh's recent efforts to strengthen its relationship with Burma, particularly on Rohingya issues. It's essential that Bangladesh continue to work with regional partners to find ways to address the root causes of Rohingya displacement, including endemic poverty, and discrimination.

These efforts are worthy of praise, however, much work remains to be done and we continue to urge the Government of Bangladesh to consider a few issues from the humanitarian perspective.

Regarding the strategy, I urged officials to ensure that it is implemented in a way that meets international legal and humanitarian standards. First and foremost, this means ensuring the safety and security of the Rohingya people, protecting their rights and giving them access to education and employment, along with the freedom of movement.

Beyond this, I urged Bangladeshi officials to grant official permission to international NGOs to continue providing life-saving humanitarian aid—and not only to the Rohingya, but also to the local Bangladeshi population in the Bangladesh-Burma border region and other vulnerable individuals fleeing Rakhine State.

This official permission should be granted even as other efforts are underway to build local NGO capacity to provide aid more effectively.

Finally, I urged the Government of Bangladesh, as part of the strategy on Rohingya, to allow the U.S. government to resume the resettlement of eligible Rohingya registered with UNHCR.

In sum, let me just reiterate that the U.S. Government is committed to working with Bangladesh to provide assistance and create lasting solutions for the Rohingya. We understand how challenging this situation is for both Bangladesh and the region. Working together, there is no doubt that we can make progress that benefits both the people of this country and the vulnerable Rohingya that Bangladesh has taken in.

Thank you, and I would be happy to take a few questions at this point.

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